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To cite this article: Angela Kallhoff & Thomas Schulte-Umberg (2015) The Committed Soldier: Religion as a Necessary Supplement to a Moral Theory of Warfare, *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, 16:4, 434-448, DOI: [10.1080/21567689.2015.1132415](https://doi.org/10.1080/21567689.2015.1132415)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/21567689.2015.1132415>



Published online: 23 Mar 2016.



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The Committed Soldier: Religion as a Necessary Supplement to a Moral Theory of Warfare

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ABSTRACT *The right-making properties of wars, if there are any, have been scrutinized in Just War Theory. Recently, authors have turned to a blind spot in that context: Just War Theory has started to focus on moral implications of warfare regarding soldiers who fight a war. In this contribution, we reconstruct that recent turn of normative theory towards the soldier. We argue that in order to give a conclusive account of the moral implications of the soldier's actions, it is necessary to include religion. Religion is not only part of the motivational setting of 'the committed soldier'; it is also an important institutional factor in realizing war. In order to explain the various functions of religion, we discuss examples of religiously committed soldiers in World War I. Research in this context reveals clusters of personal religious convictions, a religiously founded culture of comradeship, and a visible organization of collectivity in terms of religious institutions. Our claim is that this acknowledgment of religion contributes to another theoretical twist in Just War Theory.*

From the perspective of a single soldier, the fact that he is part of the military is not only a fact, but also an action-guiding knowledge. In turn, the ethos of the troops, obedience to leaders and also service for the nation are common grounds in assessing the role of single soldiers. Yet, it is not particularly convincing that this subscription to war as a collective event is the only motivating force for soldiers who fight a war. Remember that they have to endure extreme and life-threatening experiences in fulfilling their daily tasks. Recently, a new emphasis has been put on the role of religion in motivating soldiers. Studies on World War I (WWI) in particular demonstrate how important the role not only of religion, but of religious institutions, have been in supporting soldiers in fulfilling their tasks.¹ In this contribution, we wish to explore this recent insight in the importance of religion in the context of Just War Theory. Until today, Just War Theory is the locus classicus for debating the morality of warfare; moreover, it provides

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¹As overviews for the major belligerent nations in WWI see Xavier Boniface, *Histoire religieuse de la Grande Guerre* (Paris: Fayard, 2014); Adrian Gregory, 'Beliefs and Religion' in Jay Winter and Editorial Committee of the International Research Centre of the Historial de la Grande Guerre (eds) *Civil Society*, vol. 3, *The Cambridge History of the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 418–444; Michael Snape, 'The Great War' in Hugh McLeod (ed) *World Christianities c. 1914–c.2000*, vol 9, *The Cambridge History of Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 131–150.

a broad and diverse set of basic moral doctrines in assessing the moral side of war and of going to war.²

Even though this framework has received critique,³ it is still the only comprehensive approach in debating whether or not tactics in the battlefield are fair and whether or not a nation or a group of national parties are justified to go to war. In particular, this framework has been overhauled by authors in philosophy who argue that a new focus of concern is necessary: The claim that it is time to study the morality of warfare as an ethics that explores killing in war anew.⁴ Simultaneously, it is necessary to re-examine the single soldier's position in this context.⁵ This coheres with a growing interest in the single soldier's motives and even moral background in studying historic events, among them WWI in particular.⁶

Religion does not only provide highly relevant motivational factors for soldiers. It is also now a commonplace that religion and the churches are not innocent when it comes to war and to the battlefield. If soldiers know that they are fulfilling a mission sanctioned and at least partially sanctified by God, religion might be a highly motivating factor for single soldiers. As studies of WWI can prove, the motivating power is particularly strong when mixed up with a collective realization of religion, as for instance by means of stressing religious fellowship, but also by means of institutions that exemplify and enable collectives.⁷ With the discussion of examples taken from that context, we wish to put forward two claims: *Firstly*, it is this specific mixture of religious content – including the idea of moral accuracy of war – of a culture of fellowship and of a visible background-organization that provides and consolidates a motivation for soldiers to act as they do on a daily level. *Secondly*, to some degree, this includes a more general point: In order to understand the rationales in terms of motivating reasons of soldiers, it is necessary to step beyond the models of individual moral agency as put forward by philosophers on the one hand, and as machines without moral compass, more or less instruments of others direction and will.⁸ In interpreting the soldier's motivation, it is also necessary to include a cluster of personal religious convictions, a culture of comradeship, and a visible organization of collectivity on a daily level.

In this contribution, we wish to argue that these insights are very important in extending and revising some important aspects of recent Just War Theory. The contribution is organized in five sections. In section one, we provide a frame for the discussion of the examples in exploring the recent turn of Just War Theory towards the single soldier, and more broadly towards the combatant. In section two, we focus on the consequences this his

²For an overview over both the tradition and the recent debate of Just War Theory, see Helen Frowe, *The Ethics of War and Peace: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2011).

³See, for instance, David Rodin, *War and Self-Defense* (Oxford/New York: Clarendon Press/Oxford University Press, 2002); Henry Shue, 'Do we need a "Morality of War"?' in David Rodin and Henry Shue (eds) *Just and Unjust Warriors: The Moral and Legal Status of Soldiers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 87–111.

⁴Jeff McMahan, *Killing in War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2009).

⁵See Rodin and Shue, *Just and Unjust Warriors*, op. cit.; Cécile Fabre, *Cosmopolitan War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁶For a comprehensive sourcebook of textual religious traditions on war and religion, see Gregory M. Reichberg and Henrik Syse with Nicole M. Hartwell (eds) *Religion, War, and Ethics: A Sourcebook of Textual Traditions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). Since the late 1990s there has been an ongoing trend towards a 'new military history' focusing on the everyday life and war experiences of common soldiers. A classic is Benjamin Ziemann, *War Experiences in Rural Germany: 1914–1923* (Oxford: Berg, 2006) first published in German in 1997.

⁷For a defense of this claim and the relevant literature, see section 4.

⁸For philosophical arguments that focus on the single soldier and his or her limited, but nevertheless existent capacity to act in war, see Cécile Fabre, op. cit.; Judith Lichtenberg, 'How to Judge Soldiers Whose Cause is Unjust' in Rodin and Shue, *Just and Unjust Warriors*, op. cit., pp. 112–130; F.M. Kamm, *Ethics for Enemies: Terror, Torture & War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Classic military history regards soldiers mostly as a part of a collective, and not more. However, it has something in common with a pacifist mood that regards a soldier as a robot trained to kill.

general shift has in terms of scrutinizing the single soldier's role in war. In section three, we turn towards religious commitment. Our main claim is that – at least as for our historic example: soldiers in WWI – the thesis that religion is simply another aspect of the motivational forces of soldiers in the battlefield is ill-set. Instead, religion provides a complex background that has several meanings for the soldier, in particular as an institutional setting that provides basic services, as a motivational source, as a resource of hope and consolation, and as a source for the conviction of 'doing the right thing'. In section four, we provide a theoretical background for explaining this specific trait of religion. It says that collectivity is an important aspect in explaining the soldiers' religious commitments; yet, collectivity enters the scene in an indirect way by means of supporting comradeship, as right-making property of individual acts, and as proof of divine order. In section five, we draw some conclusions from our analysis of the impact of religion on concepts of moral agency in warfare. In particular, we wish to propose a more fine-grained and a more comprehensive approach to the commitment of soldiers than normative discourses on the moralities of warfare usually provide. In order not to overstate our findings, we narrow them down to the historic example of soldiers in WWI. The historiography of WWI has eminently profited of a stronger focus on its transnational and intercultural aspects. This will also be helpful for our understanding of the role of religion.⁹ Yet, we also think that some of the findings can provide as useful in assessing the role of religion in war and in assessing war from a moral perspective more generally.

1. The Frame: The Recent Turn of Just War Theory towards the Combatant's Viewpoint

In the tradition of philosophy and religious studies that debates the moral implications of war, which is Just War Theory, war has been explored as a collective event. War is a military conflict among collectives that fight against each other.¹⁰ As a consequence, the practices of soldiers in war have primarily been regarded as contributing to the collective endeavor called war. In Just War Theory, the single soldier has generally been exempt from moral accusation, even so in killing another person.¹¹ In particular, it is not the soldier who needs to decide whether or not he fights for the just cause. Instead, the legitimate leader of a political community has to decide whether or not taking up arms is justified by a just cause, including justification by means of proportionality and procedural fairness.¹²

The '*Jus in bello*' that discusses fair practices in fighting a war that has already started also pays little tribute to the inner life of the soldier. It says that cruelty should be reduced to a possible minimum; yet, even though killing remains morally condemnable, soldiers are again not per se morally culpable in killing the enemy in the battlefield. Instead, they are asked to not to engage in cruelties against the enemy, including practices turned against prisoners of war. In particular, they need to respect the rights of civilians.¹³

⁹A first comprehensive attempt in that direction is Martin Greschat, *Der Erste Weltkrieg und die Christenheit: Ein globaler Überblick* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2013).

¹⁰This dictum has been overhauled in the context of 'new wars', including terrorist attacks. In this contribution, we draw on traditional wars among nations. Yet, the outcomes can also to some degree be applied to non-traditional wars, since they do not primarily result from a specific constellation, but from the motivational factors of soldiers. On the concept of a 'new war', see Herfried Münkler, *Die neuen Kriege* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch, 2004).

¹¹For a debate on the limits of a right of self-defense, see David Rodin, *War and Self-Defense* (Oxford: Clarendon Press/Oxford University Press, 2002).

¹²For an overview over the key criteria for a 'Just War', see Frowe, op. cit.

¹³*Ibid.*, pp. 95–117.

In stark contrast to this traditional conception of the soldier's role in war, recent contributions in the philosophy of war and in historic research on war have highlighted the combatant's role from a different perspective. Even though tribute is paid to the exceptional circumstances of warfare, and even though membership in the military is a stark bond that has moral implications, soldiers cannot be exempt from a normative assessment in terms of culpability and responsibility for killing another person.¹⁴ Due to an additional criterion that Jeff McMahan introduces into the debate on just war, even the act of killing another person is now regarded as a decision the morality of which cannot be whipped away. Even though the additional criterion is particularly intricate, it can be broken down to the claim that persons should only be allowed to be killed in war, if they are 'liable' to being killed.¹⁵

In order to explain this recent theoretical shift towards the single soldier, this seminal theoretical shift in the philosophy of war has to be recalled first. In just war theory, the moral assessment of war has been split into two separate theoretical parts. The *Jus ad bellum* provides the background for exploring whether or not the decision to take arms is justified. It develops a set of substantial just causes and procedural criteria for starting a war. The *Jus ad bellum* has been dedicated to scrutinizing decisions of legitimate political leaders and illegitimate belligerents. In traditional just war theory this theory is uncoupled from *Jus in bello*. The latter focuses on acts of war and of killing during warfare and provides norms for abating acts of cruelty. In particular, in *Jus in bello*, even acts of killing the enemy soldier are not forbidden. Instead, the right to life is bracketed.¹⁶ In particular, the questions of whether or not the soldier who kills another person – which means that his cause has already been decided as fighting the just-war-side – is put into brackets. It is the underlying idea of the *Jus in bello* that rules of right conduct in war should not be refrained to one side. Instead, the rules of conduct apply to each single soldier.

The separation of both parts of just war theory has an important consequence regarding the moral assessment of the actions of soldiers in war. Even if an assessment of the *Jus ad bellum* comes to the conclusion that one belligerent party fights a just cause and the other is wrong in taking the arms, this will not have an impact on the moral constraints on the actions of soldiers on both sides. The separation of both doctrines supports the view of the moral equality of combatants.¹⁷ In particular, it also contributes to separating the question of whether or not killing another person in a situation of warfare is allowed from the issues of culpability and responsibility in wartimes. Yet, precisely these consequences and their theoretical foundations

¹⁴For an overview over this recent debate, see Rodin and Shue, *Just and Unjust Warriors*, op. cit.

¹⁵McMahan states: 'In my view . . . the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate targets does not coincide with that between combatants and noncombatants. Rather, what discrimination requires is that soldiers target only those who are morally responsible for an unjust threat or for some other grievance that provides a just cause for war. If that is right, soldiers who lack a just cause also lack legitimate targets': Jeff McMahan, 'Just Cause for War', *Ethics & International Affairs*, 19:3 (2005), p. 6. In another context, McMahan gives another formulation of the liability-criterion: 'It cannot be *merely* a matter of luck. A person cannot become liable to defensive action without having engaged in some form of voluntary action that had some reasonably foreseeable risk of creating a wrongful threat. But when two people have acted in the same way, it can then be a matter of luck that one becomes liable to defensive action while the other does not': McMahan, *Killing in War*, p. 177.

¹⁶Yet, this exemption has been judged differently. Following the famous doctrine of double effect, the allowance of killing a person is based on the fact, that it cannot be avoided in realizing a highly desirable end. Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*, 4th ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2006), pp. 34–47. The *locus classicus* for a defense of the doctrine of double effect is: G.E.M. Anscombe, 'War and Murder' in *Ethics, Religion and Politics: Collected Philosophical Papers Vol. III* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981), pp. 62–71. For a recent discussion of 'side-effect deaths', see Kamm, op. cit., pp. 141–156.

¹⁷Even though Michael Walzer provides a systematic overhaul of classical just war theory, he sticks with the doctrine of the 'moral equality of combatants', once a war has been started. See Walzer, op. cit., pp. 34–47.

have been called into question by Jeff McMahan. He argues that even though soldiers act in exceptional circumstances, this does not mean that they are exempt from being regarded as persons who act and therefore also need to reflect on what they are doing – even so in a situation in which they kill another person in an act of self-defense.

The arguments of McMahan are intricate; in recalling them, we shall focus on the issue of how McMahan introduces ‘moral agency’ into the situation of person A killing person B.¹⁸ Let us presuppose, both A and B are soldiers and both have subscribed to the rules of the military of the belligerent parties. They are in a situation in which a war convention exists; yet, as enemies this war convention does not include a statement on whether or not they are morally allowed to kill the enemy. Two options in a moral assessment of the act of killing are opposed to each other.

- (a) Due to the exceptional situation of wartime, A’s act of willfully killing B is not regarded as morally forbidden, if A obeys the rules of *Jus in bello*. Following the equality-of-combatants-these, this judgment applies to all legitimate combatants and to soldiers in particular. This is the position of traditional Just War Theory that has been recalled by Michal Walzer.¹⁹
- (b) A’s act of killing B is not exempt from a moral assessment as an act of murder, even not so in times of warfare and even so in a situation in which B is a soldier and an enemy. Instead, the act of killing needs to be scrutinized in the light of several criteria, among them the question of whether or not B is liable for being killed.

Yet, scenario (b) needs some specification. Jeff McMahan wishes to distinguish between two scenarios in terms of moral responsibility of the victim. If the act of killing hits a person who has forfeited her right of not being killed, because she herself has been involved in killing other persons or in causing cruelties of warfare, she is liable to be killed. This results from former wrongful actions. This soldier has lost his innocence by ‘being responsible for his objectively wrongful action even if he is not blameworthy’.²⁰ The latter modification of a lack of blameworthiness is important and has stimulated further debate.²¹ Different from this assessment, the act of killing might hit a person who is either ‘innocent’ in not having been involved herself in killing; or the person who kills has at least partial excuses for what she is doing, as for instance duress, incomplete knowledge of the circumstances (epistemic limitations) or a limited responsibility in some other respect.²² In scenario (b), the act of killing hits a person who is innocent. In particular, it might hit a person who is fighting for a just cause (here: no longer upholding the classical distinction) and she is in a situation of self-defense that coheres with the criteria of last resort, proportionality, etc. In a situation like that, person A would not be exempt from being accused of killing an innocent person. She would even have to accept being killed herself.²³

This moral assessment of killing an enemy in a situation of war has spurred a vigorous debate. It provides a sketch of the soldier’s position in warfare that is different from the former assessment of soldiers as primarily bound by the laws of *Jus in bello* and their military ethos. Instead, soldiers are now introduced as moral agents. This is not only an unusual

¹⁸For reasons of analytic clarity, we shall set aside the further question of how a moral assessment of acts in wartime relate to a legal frame that needs to minimize moral concerns. See Shue, op. cit.

¹⁹Walzer, op. cit.

²⁰McMahan, *Killing in War*, p. 162.

²¹See section 3.

²²McMahan, *Killing in War*, pp. 115–122.

²³Ibid., p. 178.

perspective on the soldier. Moreover, in McMahan's analysis and in subsequent debates on the soldier's moral responsibility, it has gained momentum. In particular, it raises the difficult question of how to distinguish excusable acts of killing from questions of straightforward blameworthiness.²⁴ In particular, this new approach to soldiers as at least partly moral agents spurs further questions.

2. The Turn Towards Individual Moralities of Warfare

The interpretation of soldiers as at least partly responsible moral agents provides a radical alternative to the common interpretation of a soldier as a small cog of a machine called the military. Jeff McMahan claims that a soldier is a person who even in the most extreme situation of his life, in the situation of killing in self-defense, is not exempt from scrutinizing his act in a moral way. He appears to think that a soldier in the battlefield is capable of deciding whether or not he should kill the enemy in a situation of immediate threat. Moreover, it appears as if he claims that a soldier should do that. He even thinks that a soldier is prepared to weigh grades of moral responsibility:

I will assume that it is uncontroversial that when an agent is to some degree culpable for posing a threat of wrongful harm to another, that agent is liable to defensive attack. Culpable and Partially Excused Threats are, therefore, liable to defensive attack. Liability is, however, a matter of degree and the degree of a Partially Excused Threat's liability depends on the strength of the excusing conditions that apply to his or her action.²⁵

In the remainder of this contribution, we shall not side with McMahan in claiming moral agency. Jeff McMahan might not have assessed the epistemic limitations in assessing the war scenario correctly, when he wishes to see an assessment of the liability of an enemy of being killed. But he might be right in judging that the soldier's act of killing is not a blind reflex, nor is it something that can be explained by reference to what military duty commands. In particular, McMahan opens a window for scrutinizing what we wish to term the 'commitment' of soldiers to fulfilling their duty and thereby also to kill an enemy combatant. The committed soldier is aware of what he is doing, even in the battlefield. Yet, in order to explain his commitment, an approach to a moral assessment will not suffice. Instead, motivational factors as strong as comradeship-bonds and religious convictions need to be reflected, too.

Authors in philosophy have already paved the way for this re-assessment in distinguishing three options to elaborate on the acts of single soldier. We shall term them the 'moral obligations-perspective', the 'moral fault-perspective' and the 'moral motives-perspective'. We claim that the third perspective is one that needs to be deepened – and can be deepened by taking into account religion. Moreover, we argue in section four that taking into account the third aspect will also have a deep impact on the other two aspects.

(a) *Moral obligation*

Authors who take the line of thought of Jeff McMahan seriously, go one step further in applying a deontological ethics to warfare. Actually, McMahan argues that the general

²⁴See Judith Lichtenberg, 'How to Judge Soldiers Whose Cause is Unjust' in David Rodin and Henry Shue, *Just and Unjust Warriors*, pp. 112–130.

²⁵McMahan, *Killing in War*, p. 175.

bracketing of a 'right to life' of the enemy in warfare is no longer tolerable. Instead, only persons who are 'liable of being killed' deserve being killed. Henry Shue highlights two respects, in which the proposal of McMahan needs to be corrected. *Firstly*, one has to distinguish thoroughly between a morality of everyday life and a morality of warfare. The second is an exceptional situation; and it is unfair to apply general moral requirements in that situation.²⁶ *Secondly*, Just War Theory is not a moral theory in the strict sense. Instead, it is infused by moral theory *to some degree*. Its most important aspect is providing a legal framing, not a moral one.²⁷ Yet, authors have also worked into a different direction. They say that McMahan is right in bracketing the right to kill an enemy in wartime, even in terms of cancelling the sharp distinction between *Jus ad bellum* and *Jus in bello* or by focusing on liability as an additional criterion in Just War Theory. Instead, a new era of Just War Theory needs to expand on the basic rights of persons, including rights of soldiers. Cécile Fabre goes so far as to say that just war theory needs to be framed in the context of a cosmopolitan ethics.²⁸ As a consequence, the right to life cannot be bracketed, even so in a situation of warfare. This human-rights approach has deep consequences for Just War Theory.

(b) *Moral fault*

If soldiers are – at least to some degree – regarded as agents who are capable of judging liability, they are regarded as moral agents. This provides the background for also debating issues of moral fault anew. Since the exceptional situation of soldiers still matters, a fine-grained approach to assessing moral fault is necessary. The soldier is in a life-threatening situation, but not in a situation that allows him calm reasoning in any way. Judith Lichtenberg argues that applying concepts of 'fault' or even moral blameworthiness is particularly inadequate. Instead, she puts forward criteria for different types of excuses and their status, including culpability as related to legitimate excuses.²⁹

(c) *Moral motives*

Finally, the new debate also opens a door for re-addressing the question of moral motives. In our view, this needs to be expanded, both in order to provide a more comprehensive interpretation of the soldiers' actions in war, as also in order to overhaul Just War Theory. Soldiers are – of course – motivated by a range of diverse motives. In particular, Nancy Sherman has explored the relevance of motives that relate to just causes.³⁰ Soldiers are not only persons who bear responsibility; and who will become guilty in some way or another. They also suffer from situations in which the certainty about the just cause vanishes. Becoming part of the army has a meaning for soldiers. In particular, they do so, because they think it is the right thing to do – among other motives, soldiers wish to serve the just cause. Yet, what happens, when this just cause is not there? When coming home not only oneself, but even the comrades and friends have serious doubts about the wars being fought?³¹

²⁶Shue, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

²⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 81–97.

²⁸Cécile Fabre, *op. cit.*

²⁹Judith Lichtenberg, 'The Ethics of Retaliation', *Philosophy & Public Policy Quarterly*, 21:4 (2001), pp. 4–8; Lichtenberg, 'How to Judge Soldiers.'

³⁰Nancy Sherman, *The Untold War: Inside the Hearts, Minds, and Souls of Our Soldiers* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010).

³¹Nancy Sherman explores this approach to 'morality' from a different angle, too. She studies virtue ethics in order to contribute to issues of the soldiers' ethos: Nancy Sherman, *Stoic Warriors: The Ancient Philosophy behind the*

In summarizing the arguments, we wish to highlight that Just War Theory has recently turned towards the single soldier's perspective in a specified way. Instead of still debating the moral aspects of warfare from the perspective of a tradition that has collected arguments for justifying self-defense of a nation, the new perspective instead interprets soldiers no longer as exempt from any moral responsibility. Instead, there is a new focus on the soldier as a moral agent, yet a moral agent in very restrained circumstances. This perspective stimulates a range of new research questions. One of them is the question of whether or not blameworthiness, culpability and moral fault are reliable concepts in addressing the moral agency of soldiers in wartime. Moreover, the questions of what keeps a soldier going in an extreme situation and what motivates him are now pressing questions.

In the remainder of the article we shall argue that religion needs to be taken very seriously at this point. From the historian's perspective religion is not only one of the different driving forces of wars. Recent studies in the performances and acts of soldiers in WWI demonstrate that religion has an enormous impact on soldiers and on what they are willing to do in a situation of warfare.³² We focus our analysis on examples from WWI in order to provide not only a theoretical setting, but also for reasons on rendering the points we wish to make as precise as possible. In particular, we do not wish to speak about religion in general terms; instead, we explore traits of religious commitment that – at a certain point, but not overall – can be generalized.

3. The Role of Religion for the Soldier's Commitment: Examples from WWI

If one tries to come to terms with the relatedness of religion and military morale in WWI one has to consider two basic elements. Fighting in any war confronts the combatants with the potential to take the life of their adversaries and the imminent danger of their own death. In an era of mass armies and general conscription it was not likely to be assumed that most of the soldiers would be willing to override their inclination against killing and especially their self-preservation instinct for a longer period of time. Already contemporaries mused about the reasons for the willingness of the soldiers not only to endure that war for more than four years, but to display high degrees of resilience and combat performance. At least most of the soldiers and Commanders had an answer to that: Of course numbers and equipment counted, but the decisive factor for the outcome would be the moral value of the troops.³³

As a German veteran of the First World War and scholar of military science summed it up in the early 1930s, morale 'encompasses all the martial virtues, among which courage and boldness, resolution, tenacity, the will to triumph and also the endurance of strain and privation stand in the first position'.³⁴ Military organization should provide a basis

Military Mind (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). Yet, in her recent book, she is particularly interested in the role that ethical convictions of rightness play in healing traumata from war. See Nancy Sherman, *Afterwar: Healing the Moral Wounds of Our Soldiers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

³²Alexander Watson, *Enduring the Great War: Combat, Morale and Collapse in the German and British Armies, 1914–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). See also Alexander Watson, 'Morale' in Jay Winter and Editorial Committee of the International Research Centre of the Historial de la Grande Guerre (eds) *The State*, vol. 2, *The Cambridge History of the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 174–195.

³³See Watson, 'Morale', pp. 174–176. A classic example can be found in Ferdinand Foch, *Des principes de la guerre. Conférences faites en 1900 à l'École supérieure de guerre* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1911) pp. 264–285. Foch led the allied forces to victory in 1918.

³⁴Friedrich Altrichter, *Die seelischen Kräfte des deutschen Heeres im Frieden und im Weltkriege* (Berlin: Mittler, 1933), p. 41.

for morale. Harsh discipline, the professionalization of the officer corps and the encouragement of mutual trust among the soldiers were seen as necessary elements from the beginning. The creation of what today are called 'primary groups' in the sense of self-supporting, self-supervising teams of some dozen soldiers was in effect crucial for the perseverance of soldiers on the battlefields of WWI.

However, military organization couldn't provide a comprehensive basis for morale. The call to arms of millions of soldiers was in all countries justified by presenting the war as a defensive struggle to protect the homeland. Threats of invasion, alleged and real atrocities committed by the foe and the experience of the devastation of villages formed a lasting basis for a commitment to the cause.³⁵ Variations of the lines 'luckily our community has been spared from war so far' or 'I fight for you' can be found in many of the letters passed between soldiers and their families. However, the commitment to defend the home had its limits. The death of relatives and friends, the seemingly lack of understanding for the realities of war on the civilian side, war profiteers, a certain degree of mistrust against the governments and starvation especially in Austria-Hungary, Germany and Russia and the longer than expected duration of the war challenged the morale of the soldiers. So commanders turned to religion. A Divisional Chaplain of a Bavarian Infantry Division was told by his Divisional Commander:

trench war puts new demands on the men and on the chaplains. Exc. asks to emphasise ... the meritouriosness for heaven of the the mens sacrifice for the fatherland ... There was a time when nobody anticipated the decisive importance of pastoral care in trench warfare it has now.³⁶

The British Commander Haig would have agreed.³⁷

Turning to religion as a booster for the morale of the troops was in no way an astonishing fact in early-twentieth-century Europe. For the generation that fought the First World War religious belief and practice were still almost everywhere normal rather than exceptional. All countries in Europe relied heavily on the services of the churches for a strengthening of the soldiers' morale. Nothing illustrates this more precisely than the massive expansion or build-up of Military Chaplaincies. In laicistic France and in the Kingdom of Italy, at that time in a severe conflict with the papacy, a force of several thousands of military chaplains was installed.³⁸ The supreme commander of Italy deemed them necessary to instill some fighting spirit especially in the conscripts from southern Italy who couldn't understand why they should fight Rome's war. Austria-Hungary's army was composed of soldiers from 11 ethnic groups with a multid denominational background. There was made every effort to take care of their religious needs, nearly depleting some parts of the hinterland

³⁵The desire to defend the homeland ... proved a remarkably stable base on which to mobilize a people': Alexander Watson, *Ring of Steel: Germany and Austria-Hungary in World War I* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), p. 73.

³⁶Diary entry of the Divisional Chaplain of the 3rd Bavarian Infantry Division, Anton Foohs, 16 November 1915, in Carl Werner Müller (ed.) *'Verzicht auf Revanche': Das Kriegstagebuch 1914/18 des Divisionspfarrers der Landauer Garnison Dr. Anton Foohs* (Speyer: Verlag der Pfälzischen Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Wissenschaften, 2010), p. 100.

³⁷See Michael Snape, *God and the British Soldier. Religion in the British Army in the First and Second World Wars* (London, New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 96–98. Haig was crucial in establishing a front-line role for chaplains in the build-up for the Somme offensive.

³⁸For France see Xavier Boniface, *L'aumônerie militaire française, 1914–1962* (Paris: Le Cerf, 2001), pp. 65–153; for Italy see Roberto Morozzo Della Rocca, *La fede e la guerra. Cappellani militari e preti soldati 1915–1919* (Udine: Gaspari, 2015).

especially of Roman Catholic priests.³⁹ For Russia there seems to have been a relation of one priest per two thousand soldiers.⁴⁰ Of course, the military chaplaincies in WWI differed in their organization, structure and rules of conduct. Confessional differences were to some extent decisive for the daily practices of the chaplains and the soldiers. But also here one can encounter the force of religion for the morale of the soldiers in terms of what they were fighting for. The US troops arrived in 1917 with a mainly voluntary force of army chaplains, organized as a united band of brothers and thereby displaying a sign of unity from a multi-ethnic society with its religious fault lines.⁴¹ In the German Army Catholic and Protestant chaplains sometimes celebrated interdenominational services and, more often, held sermons for soldiers from both confessions.⁴² In Austria-Hungary, on the other hand, the Catholic field bishop stressed the importance of the observation of confessional boundaries as a sign of acceptance of Habsburg tolerance.⁴³

Chaplains doing their religious duties and improving the troop's morale were not doing separate things; instead, both tasks were closely intertwined. Therefore pastoral caregiving to the troops has to be put in the right context, that is the military course of a war. Despite the outstanding importance of the 'Materialschlachten' of 1916 their significance for the role of army chaplains has been inadequately evaluated. For the British Army Michael Snape has shown how in advance of the Battle of the Somme in 1916 the British General Headquarters (GHQ) did almost everything to instill a spirit of cooperation between military chaplains, officers and troops in battle. In fact, British Divisions had in 1916 more chaplains at their service (17) than the Austro-Hungarians (10–12).⁴⁴ As Snape is able to show, the British were very successful. A similar impact had the battles of Verdun, the Somme, the Brussilow-Offensive and the various Isonzo-Battles on pastoral care-giving for the troops in the Austro-Hungarian and German armies. The Austro-Hungarians systematized their insights from 1916 onwards into a more systematic approach to use religion for their war effort. For various reasons the Germans chose a different way, reorganizing their military chaplaincy along lines that paralleled very much the ongoing adaptation processes of the German Army itself. An example for the effects of the course

³⁹Due to the at least bilingual composition of most regiments every military chaplain had to be fluent in two or more of the officially 11 languages spoken in the monarchy. This excluded most of the only-German-speaking priests from what is today Austria and placed a heavy burden on other parts, where priests had to be able to converse in German and Hungarian or Polish and Ruthenian. For example only 20 of the Roman Catholic clergy of the Archdiocese of Salzburg served as military chaplains, but in October 1917 at least 105 of the Archdiocese of Esztergom in upper Hungary. See for the numbers Thomas Mitterecker, "Aber ich jammere nicht, klage und verzage nicht". Die katholische Kirche Salzburgs im Dienst der Kriegspropaganda' in Oskar Dohle and Thomas Mitterecker (eds) *Salzburg im Ersten Weltkrieg: fernab der Front – dennoch im Krieg* (Wien: Böhlau, 2014), p. 272 n9; Primas Csernoch Letter to Military Bishop Bjelik, 7 October 1917, Austrian State Archive, War Archive, Apostolic Military Chaplaincy, Box 164.

⁴⁰Numbers given by Dietrich Beyrau, 'Kriegsszenen. Erfahrungen an der russischen Westfront', *Osteuropa* 64: 2–4 (2014) pp. 21–41, p. 34.

⁴¹See Boniface, *Histoire religieuse*, p. 64; John Piper, *American Churches in World War I* (Ohio University Press: Athens, Ohio, 1985); Michael E. Shay, *Sky Pilots: The Yankee Division Chaplains in World War I* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2014).

⁴²For instance see Pater Adalbert Kraft, Pastoral Report, 22 September 1917. Federal Archive, Military Archive Freiburg/Br., PH 32, Folder 131.

⁴³On Habsburg tolerance in war see Marsha L. Rozenblit, *Reconstructing a National Identity: The Jews of Habsburg Austria during World War I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). However, this is not to deny the outspoken anti-Semitism of some Roman Catholic Austrian military chaplains: see for instance a Report of the Divisional Chaplain of the 58 Infantry Division, 10 July 1917, on his differences with a military rabbi: Austrian State Archive, War Archive, Military Chaplaincy, Box 181.

⁴⁴Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, p. 91; Viktor Lipusch, *Österreich-Ungarns katholische Militärseelsorge im Weltkriege* (Wien: Göth, 1938), p. 97.

of the war on the way to override the self-preservation instinct by means of religion shows an instruction from 1917. In that year the Austro-Hungarian Army High Command issued a lengthy leaflet on 'Pastoral care-giving for the troops' and sent it to every commander on battalion level and above. Initially it was written by a military chaplain serving at the Isonzo, looking back on a yearlong experience of pastoral care at that deadly front. The chaplain discussed it with his compadres and his regional superior, who in turn sent it to the head of the military chaplaincy, in denominational terms serving with the rank of a Bishop. The Bishop contacted immediately the Chief of the Army High Command, who was glad about having such an excellent document. As ordered in the Dienstrenglement of the Army, the document states, those

fundamentals, which induce human beings to fulfil their obligations ... animate their bravery, hush their fears in moments of danger and console in misfortunes, must be honored and groomed. Therefore the cultivation of the fear of God is crucial for the Army.⁴⁵

All in all, a devout soldier would be a better fighter than a nonreligious one. If he fulfils his religious obligations, the soldier 'would feel a strengthening of his moral power, because the military chaplains should have given him new courage, new trust in God, a new willingness to sacrifice his life, thereby strengthening their moral'.⁴⁶ Religion, the document concluded, would teach the soldiers that temporal life is not the highest good for the individual.

This approach to and use of religion placed a big burden on the military chaplains and religion itself. The absolute cruelty of that devastating war, the senselessness of many deaths in proportion to their effectiveness for the outcome of a fight or a battle and also the conduct of many military chaplains should, one assumes, diminish the persuasive power of religion for the morale of the soldier. The war caused some fundamental pastoral and ethical problems for soldiers and chaplains alike.⁴⁷ A major factor for the power of religion seemed to be the conduct of chaplains. Warmongering chaplains or the example of chaplains who never went to the trenches contributed to a decline of belief among their clientele, the same effect had cases of drunkenness or sexual misconduct.⁴⁸ Nevertheless military chaplains could serve as a kind of upholders of the worthiness of human life. On the civilian side they could assure relatives of killed soldiers that the death was a good one, as they were buried properly and were going directly to heaven because they fought the good fight until the end.⁴⁹ What is more, regarding its impact on military morale, are actions like telling the attacking enemies to hold their fire so as not to get slaughtered or to save the wounded lying between the lines after an attack.⁵⁰ The continuing existence of such deeds on a major scale into the last months of the war proves at least the purpose to preserve the military value of religion on its own terms.

⁴⁵Army High Command Leaflet, 'Behelf für die Pastorierung der Armee im Felde', September 1917. Austrian State Archive, War Archive, Army High Command, Quartermaster Department, Box 1966 QOP 139392/1917.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷For the British see Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, pp. 111–114; for the Italians see Della Rocca, *op. cit.*, pp. 115–132.

⁴⁸For the Austro-Hungarian side dozens of examples for all the above mentioned types of (mis-)conduct can be found in the files of the catholic military Bishop and the War Ministry located in the Austrian State Archive. The famous military chaplain Otto Katz in Jaroslav Hašek's *The Good Soldier Svejk* is not an invention, he seems to be a kind of Idealtypus in the sense of Max Weber.

⁴⁹See Boniface, *Histoire religieuse*, pp. 106–112.

⁵⁰Mark Thompson, *The White War: Life and Death on the Italian Front, 1915–1919* (London: Faber & Faber, 2009), p. 2; Lipusch, *op. cit.*, pp. 363–364.

4. Religion and Cultures of Collectivity: A Theoretical Approach

In starting the analysis of the examples that have already been presented, it is helpful to distinguish two different concepts of ‘morality’. In section one we introduced a concept of morality that coheres with the endeavor of moral philosophy to judge actions as either right or wrong. Recently, Just War Theory also includes debates on culpability, on responsibility and on blameworthiness of actions. Different from that interpretation of morality in terms of moral philosophy, morality is also used as a term that represents a family of beliefs and commitments of persons – possibly in terms of religious worldviews. In this section, we use ‘morality’ in that broader sense of the word.⁵¹

In the latter sense of the word, *moralities of warfare create a collective representation which generates a common understanding of the sense of war*. There is clearly a vital and purely intellectual element to this process. At one level, the morality of warfare depicts a sense of justification of a war; soldiers have a common understanding of the reasons for battling and the overall purpose of their mission. It is interesting to see how far-reaching this approach coheres with an approach to Just War Theory that has been theorized on separate grounds.

Yet, battle practice is not merely an intellectual enterprise, but includes what we have already termed a motivational aspect. It is not enough for participants of a war to define the situation in common and to intellectually know what they engage in. Due to the exigencies of war, soldiers must primarily be prepared to act. They have to engender obligations – part of them moral obligations for sure – in the real world of daily combat. In order to explain that characteristic trait of worldviews that support warfare as a particularly value-laden enterprise and simultaneously as a motivating source for individual actions, it is helpful to reconsider the interpretation of collectivity in Emile Durkheim’s spirit by the sociologist Anthony King.⁵²

Recently, King has shown how Emile Durkheim’s sociology of knowledge and, above all, Durkheim’s engagement with Immanuel Kant’s philosophy can usefully illustrate the way in which moral obligations may be inscribed in the military. According to King, Durkheim rejected Kant’s claims that human understanding and especially morality could be determined by individual reason alone. Durkheim was deeply impressed by the idea that the way humans comprehended the world was very substantially predetermined for them; it was not a matter of individual opinion or personal experience. Morality had a genuine necessity. Indeed, for Durkheim the way in which a community understood its world necessarily involved moral imperatives about how group members should act in that world. A social group was united not only intellectually but also morally through its shared beliefs. In particular, the compilation of insights in religion as a collective morality and the sense of ‘comradeship’ of group members are illustrative in explaining the religious soldiers’ commitment to war.

In much of his work Durkheim focuses on religion. He argues that by worshipping their god and publicly displaying their belief in this god, the members of a community were not simply consenting to a common intellectual framework, although this was vital; they were committing themselves to practices which were represented by that God. Since God seemed to stand for the common goal of the community itself, the collective confession of faith was simultaneously a demonstration of solidarity with each other. By worshipping God together, they were simultaneously reaffirming their bonds to each other. The belief in

⁵¹It is one of our claims in the project ‘Morality of warfare’ that the concept should not be reduced to one of the two meanings. Instead, it is a specific trait of the ‘moralities of warfare’ that they combine reasons for action with a belief-system that in some important respects is supported both by religious doctrines and by practices of comradeship and collectivity more broadly.

⁵²Anthony King, *The Combat Soldier: Infantry Tactics and Cohesion in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). On Durkheim and the following see esp. pp. 291–295.

their God concretely prescribed a code of conduct which the worshippers were expected to follow. Indeed, the intensity of belief was not so much induced by an intellectual consensus about the nature of the world but by the intense feeling of community of what they should do in it. A member of the community might renege on his faith, but that might be recognized as bad faith and treachery. Essentially it comes, arguing with Emile Durkheim and Anthony King, to this: To share a belief is in and of itself to be morally committed to a set of practices implied by that belief and to expect others to be so obligated as well. To accept something as epistemologically true is also necessarily to accept that certain forms of action which follow from that belief are morally right.

This coincides with different views of collectivity in the military that are frequently addressed. In terms of effectiveness the military is regarded as a collective that should be well organized; its rules of conduct are informed by a military ethos.⁵³ Moreover, the military is goal-driven in its actions, placing the mid-level of command and non-commissioned officers in different, albeit decisive positions to sustain the fighting ability of their unit. The approach to the daily lives and actions of the soldiers puts an emphasis on the social culture of comradeship, practiced by small groups of soldiers up to platoon size.⁵⁴ Bound together by the task to ease the burdens of war and to survive and succeed in combat they had to ensure the integrity of the group as far as possible. Different from this model, and still treating soldiers as a kind of machine, recent philosophical literature on the soldiers' approach to war has provided a focus on single soldiers as moral agents. Even though the capacity to 'act for reasons' is limited in the battlefield, and even though soldiers cannot be called fully responsible for their acts, they need to be regarded as single actors who know what they are doing – even in killing in self-defense. This does not say that collectivity fades away. Instead, it is particularly important for soldiers that the cause that they are fighting for is a collective goal. Moreover, the single soldier's responsibility needs to be regarded as mediated by many factors, in particular collective responsibility. With its emphasis on saving the soul of the soldier and in various ways of stressing this on a regular level, religion provided in WWI an answer to the soldiers' confrontation with killing and getting killed. Yes, he had to be a part of the military machine, but as a believer his individual person is taken seriously – even as a moral agent.

In the light of this the fusion of effectiveness, the practice of comradeship and individual morale by means of religion might be considered deeply significant for an overall willingness and the battle performance of the troops. Yet, recalling religion as a motivating factor in war is not sufficient in explaining the point that we wish to make: Religion or at least Christianity appears to be particularly useful for strengthening the commitment of soldiers to engaging in warfare for another reason, too.

For discussing this point, one has to look at the character of Christianity in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. What has to be called the individualization of religion hadn't reached the scale that evolved from the 1950s onwards.⁵⁵ What seems today as outdated and out of practice has to be considered as common knowledge and practice for most of the soldiers fighting in WWI. Consider for example the sightings of one of the most astute observers of the morale of the Austro-Hungarian soldiers in World War One, the

⁵³See Christian Stachelbeck, *Militärische Effektivität im ersten Weltkrieg: Die 11. Bayerische Infanteriedivision 1915 bis 1918* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2010); Allan R. Millett and Williamson Murray (eds) *Military Effectiveness: The First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁵⁴For France see Alexandre Lafon, *La camaraderie au front: 1914–1918* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2014); for Germany see Markus Pöhlmann, 'Front' in Markus Pöhlmann, Harald Potempa and Thomas Vogel (eds) *Der Erste Weltkrieg 1914–1918. Der deutsche Aufmarsch in ein kriegerisches Jahrhundert* (München: Bucher 2014), pp. 137–153.

⁵⁵For historians it should be a truism: 'Christianity still framed the personal and public morality of most of Europe' before and in WWI: Snape, *The Great War*, p. 139.

officer Constantin Schneider, himself a secular-minded man. Nevertheless he noted the eminence of religion among Catholic soldiers from Tyrol in battle, giving them a sense of belonging by doing what they did together.⁵⁶ Leaving those practices aside meant threatening not only oneself, but also the collective. So religion didn't only provide soldiers with a special sense of being on a mission sanctioned and at least partially sanctified by God, but of doing the right thing in a community that had to prove itself to be righteous by the way of religion. Even some Czech units, infamous in the Austro-Hungarian army for their willingness to desert or surrender, seemed to be fit for action after a period of religious instruction.⁵⁷ To understand and to use this logic of religion proved to be a backbone for the efforts of the military, including the military chaplaincies, to strengthen the war morale of the common soldier.

5. Conclusion

A thorough exploration of the impact of religion and religious commitments on soldiers in WWI provides the insight, that there are three important factors that need to be distinguished, but are nevertheless intermeshed with each other: a religious message that justifies war as a mission from heaven or a mission that serves a higher goal, the culture of comradeship spurred by the conviction of a common mission, and a visible institution that enacts this culture on a daily level by providing services to the military personal and the families.

One important lesson is that 'collectivity' in warfare needs to be interpreted in a way that differs significantly both from traditional interpretations of soldiers as parts of a machine; but also from recent debates on collectivity in terms of 'joint action' and in terms of 'shared responsibility'.⁵⁸ A second-order collectivity is particularly important for understanding the soldier's commitment. In order not to overstate this observation, we have constrained our exploration to a specific war, and our examples are mostly from research on the role of Christianity in WWI. In that time, commitment to religion had an enormous impact on the morale of soldiers on the battlefield. Yet, the lessons that can be learned are supported by a theoretical approach that allows drawing more general conclusions.

Even though it is right that soldiers do not have to be regarded as small cogs in the machine called the military, they cannot be regarded as individuals who decide on their own, either. Instead, recent research on the moral attitudes of soldiers in WWI suggest that collectivity plays an important role on an altogether different level of concern: The 'morality of war' that supports soldiers as reason-giving instances in wartime, cannot be sustained without their being convinced of war as a collective mission. Research on the religious worldviews of soldiers contributes to a differentiated approach to collectivity as second-order collectivity: The single soldier interprets his mission in the context of a mission that a collective has to bring about; moreover, his acts are embedded into a culture of 'comradeship' that also supports his morality. Instead of debating war as a collective event whose logic can be studied from a bird's perspective, the rationale of collectivity is one of a mission that only a collective can bring about.

⁵⁶Constantin Schneider, *Kriegserinnerungen*, edited by Oskar Dohle (Wien: Böhlau, 2003), p. 59.

⁵⁷See Fieldmarshal Archduke Friedrich Letter 'Ethische Erziehung der Mannschaft im Felde' to Army Group Command Colonel General Archduke Eugen, Army Command of the 1., 2., 3., 4., 5., 7., 10., 11. Army, Quartermaster Detachments 6, 8, 9, Defense Command of Tyrol and 19. Corps Command 23 May 1916. Austrian State Archive, War Archive, Army High Command, Quartermaster Department, Box 1683 QOp. 50058/1916.

⁵⁸For a philosophical assessment of these concepts, see Christopher Kutz, 'The Difference Uniforms Make: Collective Violence in Criminal Law and War', *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 33, Nr. 2 (2005), pp. 148–80.

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